



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on March 5, 2024

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## **The Goodness of America**

### **Turning Passion Into Purpose**

At Capital Manor, a senior living facility in Salem, Oregon, retired state legislator Gene Derfler has found a new purpose in woodworking. Turning a 300-square-foot space in the building's basement into a workshop, Derfler spends about nine months each year meticulously crafting wooden toy trucks with a team of other residents. These trucks aren't just any toys; they're part of a labor of love benefiting Head Start chapters in Salem, Keizer, and Polk County.

Derfler's journey into woodworking began after retirement, sparked by a lifetime fascination with wood carvings. What started as a minor interest blossomed into a full-fledged passion, with Derfler now known for his lifelike carvings of trout, steelhead, and koi, which adorn the Capital Manor café.

Despite approaching his 100th birthday, Derfler's dedication to his craft and community is unwavering. He still finds time to fish several times a year, evincing a spirit of adventure and creativity that inspires those around him.

The wooden trucks, each made with care and attention to detail, have become a symbol of joy for children in the local community. Made entirely in the Capital Manor woodshop, the trucks are a testament to the residents' commitment to spreading happiness and creating a lasting impact.

"This is done by the residents, and Capital Manor doesn't contribute anything," Derfler told *Salem Reporter*, emphasizing the commitment it takes to make the toy trucks. "It's a lot of work putting them together. I counted, and it's like 35 pieces that go into each truck. It's kind of tedious," said Derfler.

This project, which has spanned more than a decade and produced around 11,000 trucks, is entirely funded by donations. Approximately \$3,500 is required each year for supplies for the trucks.

Residents such as Emery Billings, who takes pride in mixing his own paint colors for the trucks, exemplify the team's dedication to creating something special for the children who receive them.

Watching the children choose their trucks is a highlight for Derfler and the team. Each truck represents a labor of love, from the initial design to the final assembly, and seeing the joy on the children's faces makes every hour spent in the woodshop worthwhile.

As the team continues to work on this year's batch of trucks, they hope to surpass last year's goal of 900 trucks. Donations are always welcome and can be made to Capital Manor, with a note specifying the funds are for the toy truck project.

### **Paradegoers Swoop Into Action**

In the aftermath of tragedy, heroes emerge. This was the case for a group of Kansas City Chiefs fans who took action after gunfire broke out at the victory rally in Kansas City on February 14. Trey and Casey Filter of Kansas City, along with Paul Contreras of Bellevue, Nebraska, tackled a man carrying a semiautomatic rifle, preventing a potentially dangerous situation from escalating further.

The incident occurred as the rally was wrapping up outside Union Station. When the gunman caused a commotion, bystanders immediately sprang into action, responding to calls to tackle the suspect.

Both the Filters and Contreras were attending the parade with their children.



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Contreras recalled the harrowing thoughts that went through his mind as he wrangled with the armed man.

“He’s got a gun on him; he’s going to use it. I can’t let him get up; I can’t let him get back to it. I can’t let him get to his pocket where he may have another one, I’m just assuming,” Contreras said. “He’s trying his hardest to get us off of him. He’s fighting to get up and we’re fighting to keep him down until law enforcement got there.”

They did manage to restrain the gunman until police arrived. Casey played a crucial role by safely removing the gun from the scene.

It’s not immediately clear if the person Contreras and Filter tackled is one of the two people who have been arrested for the shooting that day, *The Independent* reported. According to KCPD Chief Stacey Graves, the investigation is still “very active” and police are “working to determine the involvement of others,” as they have recovered multiple firearms at the scene of the shooting.

Alyssa Contreras captured the aftermath of the confrontation on video, showcasing the bravery and quick thinking of those involved. Their actions have been widely praised on social media, with many hailing them as heroes.

Graves expressed gratitude to the brave individuals who assisted law enforcement during the incident, acknowledging their selfless actions. “I want to thank the people who acted bravely ... alongside law enforcement,” she said.

## **Pajama Problem Solved**

Larry Farrish, Jr., a school-bus driver in Louisville, Kentucky, is known for his kindness and compassion. When he noticed one of his young passengers, Levi, was having a rough morning because he didn’t have pajamas for Pajama Day, Larry took it upon himself to make things right, TODAY.com reported.

After finishing his morning routes, Larry went to a store and bought two pairs of pajamas for Levi. He then surprised Levi at school, telling him, “You were hurting this morning, you were crying, so I got you these pajamas.” Levi’s face lit up with joy, and he hugged the pajamas tightly.

This act of kindness didn’t just brighten Levi’s day, it also touched the hearts of many others. Jefferson County Public Schools shared Larry’s story on Facebook, and it quickly went viral. People praised Larry for his caring nature and shared their own positive experiences with him.

For Larry, being a bus driver is more than just a job; it’s a passion. He loves building bonds with the children he transports and finds joy in making a difference in their lives. His act of kindness reminds us all of the power of compassion and the impact it can have on others.



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